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Immediate Release

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**Environment Secretary Approves Valencia County Wastewater Plant Permit
with Strong Provisions to Protect Environment, Cultural Values of Village**

(Santa Fe, NM) –New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) Secretary Ron Curry has approved the renewal of a groundwater discharge permit for the New Mexico Water Service Company's Rio del Oro (formerly known as UNM Valencia) wastewater treatment plant near Tome in Valencia County. This permit includes provisions necessary to ensure continued environmental protection and to honor the cultural significance of the ancient Campos Santos Cemetery located beside the plant.

The permit approves a new discharge location one and a half miles east, away from the cemetery. Provisions in the permit also require the installation of three new monitoring wells at this new point of discharge. The plant will not increase the permitted volume or the nature of its discharge. Increased monitoring was incorporated into the permit based on the input of members of the public.

"I am granting this permit renewal because the plant has worked with us and the citizens of Tome to move its discharge point away from the cemetery," said Secretary Curry. "I am also encouraged by the fact that the plant, at the urging of concerned citizens, has agreed to install three new monitoring wells to ensure that the discharge does not have an adverse impact on groundwater resources. However, considering the growth that is planned for this area, and the life expectancy of plants such as this one, I strongly encourage the utility to consider moving the plant by the time this five year permit expires."

The Rio del Oro wastewater treatment plant was built in 1985. The typical life expectancy for these plants is 20–30 years.

"At the public hearing on this permit a member of the public pointed out that George Washington was seven years old when the first person was buried at Campos Santos," Secretary Curry continued. "The historical and cultural significance of this cemetery deserves to be protected."

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The plant currently serves five schools and approximately 690 homes in the Las Maravillas and Rio del Oro subdivisions.

“I would also encourage the plant and the Village of Tome to work together to get area citizens hooked up to a wastewater collection and treatment system,” added Secretary Curry. “Providing these citizens with sewer hookups and getting them off septic tanks will help decrease environmental impact and protect the health of local citizens.”

In addition to the three new monitoring wells, the plant will continue to utilize three existing monitoring wells near the plant. Information from these six wells will be collected, analyzed and reported to NMED on a quarterly basis to ensure the protection of human health and the environment.

A public hearing on this matter spanned nearly 20 hours over two Saturdays in February and March 2003. Approximately 80 citizens attended each day of the public hearing.

For further information, please contact Jon Goldstein, NMED Communication Director at (505) 827-0314.

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